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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRAQ, MIDDLE EAST, WTO, US
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MEDIA REACTION - IRAQ

1. "OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS," editorial in the May 7 nationalist THE HINDUSTAN TIMES. "That Iraq is not yet a safe place for emigrant workers would be an understatement. While the ground situation in Iraq is yet to normalize, photographs released recently of the torture and sexual abuse of Iraqi prisoners inside the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad tell us the story of why this may not happen anytime in the near future ... Recent reports of an increasing number of Indians traveling to Iraq for employment are thus worrisome. However, there are two sides to the debate on whether Indians should at all be allowed to work in the strife-torn country. On one side there are the people being duped by recruitment agencies with promises of lucrative jobs in Gulf countries like Kuwait and being shanghaied to strife-torn Iraq ... On the flip side, however, is the right of those who knowingly wish to work in Iraq despite being fully conversant with the risks. In this category are former military or police personnel who understand the risks, but also need the generous pay packets that are being offered. Instead of inhibiting their freedom to travel and work at their own will, the Protectorate of Emigrants should attempt to curb the racketeers who have made fortunes luring the semi-literate and poor job-seekers for decades."

2. "SHOULD INDIANS HELP THE US IN IRAQ? Debate in the May 7 pro-economic-reforms THE ECONOMIC TIMES by Strategic analyst and Commentator, K. Subrahmanyam and President, Indian Ex-Services League Mohinder Singh.

a. "K. Subrahmanyam says "The reported deaths of two Indian personnel engaged in contract security duties in Iraq have raised the question whether the government should intervene in the matter. There is already a ban on sending labor to Iraq in the light of the highly unstable situation in the country. While that is entirely legitimate, the issue under consideration is whether professional security organizations can recruit and offer the services of their trained security personnel for various security related duties in Iraq. Secondly, if US security firms tried to recruit ex-servicemen and other security personnel in India either directly or otherwise, should the government interfere? It is not logical for India to stand in the way of US even recruiting Indians (either freshers or ex-servicemen) for service in the US armed forces ... In such circumstances the Union of India cannot place any impediments in the way of

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Indians offering themselves voluntarily for various security duties in Iraq if they find the emoluments attractive enough to take the risks. Delhi pursues its own national interests in determining whether it should send its armed forces to Iraq as part of the US-led coalition. But that policy is not binding on an individual Indian citizen attempting to maximize his own economic gains in a globalized market where there is a demand for his services. Here there is no ideology involved and there are not likely to be any ideological fallout. There may be risks and possible casualties. There are obviously discounted in the calculations of those who offer their services ... It is desirable to have a transparent policy in this respect."

b. "Mohinder Singh is of the opinion that "It is really unfortunate that our ex-servicemen are going to Iraq to fight some other country's war. More so when the government itself has decided against sending troops to Iraq. The logic demands that the government should bar security agencies from recruiting ex-servicemen for Iraq. But then, does the government have the moral authority to do so? A jawan is compulsorily retired at the age of 35 years. That means in the prime of his life he is forced to seek a new career ... This situation would have not arisen had the government taken care of the retired soldiers through an adequate pension ... In fact, in most cases, our jawans get a meagre pension of Rs 1,275 a month. This is less than a pension that a peon gets in a civilian job ... In such a deplorable situation, can we really blame them for seeking whatever employment opportunity comes their way? Even if it is fighting for another country. It is certainly better than the indignity of their present situation. Before we pass a judgement on the issue, we must pause and think: what is it that is forcing our ex-soldiers to take the grave risk of dying in an alien land."

3. "IRAQ ABUSE CASES ARE BO ABERRATION," analysis in the May 7 centrist THE TIMES OF INDIA by senior editor Siddharth Varadarajan.

a. "President Bush declared on Wednesday that the evidence of torture at the Abu Ghraib prison in US-occupied Iraq is "abhorrent" and "does not represent the America that I know". The reality, say US-based human rights groups and legal scholars, is that the Bush administration's 'war on terror' has spawned a set of aggressive detention and interrogation practices that have broken down the time-honored taboo against torture and exposed prisoners to the depredations of interrogators and guards who know the usual rules no longer apply. From the notorious black hole of

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Guantanamo to the numerous detention centers run offshore by the CIA so as to exclude the oversight of US courts, it is routine for prisoners to be humiliated or subjected to physical abuse and violence ... One of cornerstones of the Bush administration's new approach towards suspects is the policy of "rendition", where the US outsources the job of interrogating individuals believed to have terrorist links to countries where torture is routine - like Syria, Egypt or Morocco.

b. "In Iraq, the general remit to use force while interrogating anti-American captives has fused with the violent logic of military occupation to produce a deadly cocktail of humiliating prison rituals, sexual sadism and torture. Far from being aberrations, the US soldiers shown smiling next to their stripped trophies are the logical product of the "gloves" coming off. A review of the changing US policy towards torture and other forms of unlawful interrogation by the Center for Cooperative Research has produced literally scores of documented examples of violence against US-held prisoners - in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantanamo - as well as against those the US 'rendered' over to its allies. One of the most notorious case of US-sponsored torture to have emerged yet is that of Maher Arar, a Syrian-Canadian dual national who was taken

off a plane at JFK airport in New York in September 2002, questioned for a few days, and then handed over to Syria for the full treatment ... The internal US army report into the Abu Ghraib abuses makes it clear that much of the torture was linked to interrogations and was therefore the product of an official writ rather than individual perversity."

4. "IRAQ'S SECRETS ARE TUMBLING OUT," analysis in the May 7 centrist THE INDIAN EXPRESS by noted columnist Saeed Naqvi. "It is a pity that even as the Bush administration is running helter-skelter to contain international outrage against Iraqi prisoner abuse, there is nothing more than a murmur from the world's largest democracy ... but is the national conscience in a state of slumber because we are watching exit polls? What is happening in Iraq (and not just in Abu Gharaib and Basrah) is a shocking addition to the annals of bestiality. The global media is transmitting images of unspeakable horror. Why are we silent? Election or no election, the prime minister must take the lead (as he did when he snuffed out proposals to send Indian troops to Iraq in May 2003) to speak out against the barbarity being perpetrated behind the backs of the American and British people. A strong statement from New Delhi will be in harmony

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with the rising tide of opinion in US and Britain ... One of the depressing casualties of Desert Storm and Shock and Awe has been a pillar of the world's liberal edifice: The free Press. The shameful performance of most of the 600 or so "embedded" TV journalists (there were outstanding exceptions too), partisan reporting peddled as news, has hurt the credibility of the Western media. One still had faith that the western media would break out of restrictions imposed in the name of national security. This has begun to happen. The restoration of faith in the western electronic media could well be one of the gifts of the recent revelations. And, who knows, there may be more horrible revelations on the way. Abuses in prisons were being commonly talked about by Iraqis when I was in Baghdad last month. Why did I not write about them? There was no confirmation ... The story of prisoner abuse appears to be only the tip of the iceberg. What Americans thought were tightly kept secrets are part of common "gossip" in Baghdad. These will now reach Americans as truth resurrected by American journalists determined to restore credibility to their profession. The mist on Iraq and Afghanistan has begun to lift from the eyes of the American public, indeed the world. And now that stories of Indian mercenaries are also breaking with alarming regularity. The time may have come for some of us to resume our stations in Baghdad and Kabul. That we are already not there is a shame."

5. "IRAQ: AMERICA'S SECOND VIETNAM" op-ed article written by retired Major General V K Madhok in the May 7 Mumbai edition of Marathi daily SAKAAL. "It is to be seen if America will ever be able to set up a government of elected local representatives in Iraq. If it is not possible to do so, can the occupying coalition forces quit Iraq without further embarrassment for themselves? ... America was entangled in Vietnam for a period of eight years. Not only did it loose the war over there but it had to hurriedly withdraw its forces, too. Having lost over 500 soldiers in Iraq, a similar situation seems to be unfolding for the American forces. Strong anti-American public opinion has been

building up in Iraq. The local population sees no major difference between the American forces and Saddam Hussein. The warring factions of Shias and Sunni are united in their demand for America's withdrawal from Iraq. America's mission in Iraq has failed mainly because it has not been able to identify the main enemy in Iraq. That's why, despite the capture of Saddam Hussein, Iraq remains violent for America. Even if America now sends additional troops to Iraq, the guerrilla attacks on the American forces will be on the rise ... If America withdraws from Iraq, it will signal a victory

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of the terrorists all over the world. Therefore the U.S. should now appeal to the U.N. to take over the reins in Iraq and hold elections only after the current mayhem subsides."

6. "AMERICA'S SHAME & SHOCK IN IRAQ" edit-page article by veteran journalist Inder Malhotra in May 7, 2004, left-of-center, The Free Press Journal: "This country ought to be grateful to Prime Minister Vajpayee because he overruled his colleagues and advisers, including the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, who were keen to send Indian troops to the Iraqi quagmire last year. What an irony it is that the U.S. is trying belatedly to use the UN as a stratagem to inveigle more countries to come to its aid because it is not easy, especially in an election year to send thousands of more American troops to Iraq ... Hence the elaborate plan to get a resolution passed by the UN Security Council that would give the world body a role in Iraq after the transfer of sovereignty to Iraqis on June 30. The American ploy thus is to plead with nations like India to send troops to Iraq specifically to protect the UN personnel "which is quite different from joining the coalition forces as such". New Delhi would be foolish to fall into this trap. For, the whole business of transfer of sovereignty to Iraq is largely phony. The US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, has already made it clear that the interim Iraqi government would immediately have to delegate the sovereignty over Iraq's security to the U.S. military command or the US ambassador to Iraq until the situation has been stabilized ... It is a good sign that the Ministry of External Affairs has initiated an inquiry into the presence in Iraq of about 1500 mercenary ex-servicemen, including officers, who have evidently been enticed to go there. But the new government that comes to power after the election would have to be wary of those in the establishment that want this country to be at America's beck and call under all circumstances."

7. "U.S. IN SHAME AND SHOCK" front-page article in May 7 centrist THE TELEGRAPH by Washington-based Diplomatic Editor K.P. Nayar: "With a feeding frenzy taking hold of the American media on Iraqi prison abuses, the odds here are that US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld may be forced to resign. America's capital woke up ... to a photograph, splashed across the front page of The Washington Post, showing a female US soldier dragging a naked Iraqi detainee on the prison floor like a dog on a leash, one end of which is shown tied to the man's neck ... Angry Senators have summoned Rumsfeld to a public hearing of the Senate armed services committee ... to give his version of events in Abu Ghraib. Later, he will brief the entire Senate at a closed-door session ... For Americans closely following the

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unfolding drama on Iraq, more shocking than Rumsfeld's action in keeping Bush in the dark about the extent of

prison abuse is the callousness with which he treated complaints about the US Army's violation of the Geneva Conventions ... General Richard Myers, has said on record that neither he nor Rumsfeld immediately read an army general's report two months ago confirming allegations of abuse. Rumsfeld has admitted that he only read the executive summary of the report ... As the swirling scandal deepens, the Bush Administration, struggling hard to get a grip on things, is beginning to present a picture of confusion ... Discussing the abuse ... Powell surprisingly brought up Vietnam's My Lai massacre in 1968 without any prompting and discussed events in Abu Ghraib in the context of My Lai."

8. "BOORISH ACT OF US TROOPS" editorial in May 4 Guwahati Assamese centrist DAINIK ASOM: "It is a matter of concern that the US, who always speaks loudly about its commitment to world peace and human rights, could carry out such a heinous act against humanity. The world witnessed a similar kind of barbarism in the Vietnam war ... This time, in Iraq, the US troops have set a new precedent for atrocity ... The US military authority has reportedly punished the offender ... but such a reprimand is not going to stop tortures and humiliation of the war prisoners. It is not easy to change the mindset of the occupying troops ... The US forces' arrogance is to be blamed for brutalities inflicted on the detainees. That's why the issue has become a matter of worry for the future of the world."

9. "COALITION FORCES' SAVAGERY," editorial in May 7 nationalist RASHTRIYA SAHARA Urdu daily: "After committing the worse inhuman crimes against Iraqi prisoners, the US is now on its usual self-glorification campaign. The horrible, still under reported, stories of torture and cruelty perpetrated by the troops of the self-appointed custodian of humanity, have left the Nazi dictators far behind and made the whole of civilized world hang its head in shame. The US has said that those responsible for the crimes would be brought to justice. It is nothing but eyewash. More than the soldiers and others in charge of the prisoners, the responsibility lies with the Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and President Bush who imposed an absolutely unjustified war on Iraq and then allowed their forces to go on mass murdering and committing worse crimes. Instead of offering resignation by accepting moral responsibility of the most inhuman behavior of his troops, which is seldom expected of a person like him, what he and his team is doing is to cover up the

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whole episode and divert world attention. The US record in abusing human rights has always been horrendous to which is added the latest savagery of the coalition forces in Iraq. All talks of investigation and punishing the culprits are just eyewash."

Similar editorial appeared in May 6 independent MUNSIF Urdu daily.

10. "AMERICAN BEHAVIOR AND EXTREMISM," editorial in May 7 independent MILAP Urdu daily: "The stories the torture of Iraqi prisoners at hands of the American troops are extremely amazing and tragic. Prisoners are not the guests of honor but their human rights must be respected. The US and the UK have proved to be absolutely indifferent to these rights although they are never tired of lecturing the world

over the issue. The American government cannot absolve itself of the responsibility of abusing human rights simply by passing the blame to the soldiers or military officers in charge of the prisoners ... The stories horribly tortured, mercilessly battered and pathetically abused Iraqi prisoners are bound to generate strong reactions in the entire Arab and Muslim world. The US has already lost credibility. The new exposures will only further blacken its image."

MIDDLE EAST

11. "CHOKING PROTESTS DOESN'T KILL HOPE," analysis in the May 7 centrist THE HINDU by noted columnist Praful Bidwai. "The West Bank and Gaza are ruled by summary 'orders' issued by Israeli Defense Forces commanders, which are rarely subject to parliamentary scrutiny. Human-rights activists say this encourages arbitrary arrest, detention, torture and use of human shields ... Rights activists condemn this as an attempt to 'silence the voice of peace.' Many Palestinians, they hold, are illegitimately denied work-permits. Israelis too routinely employ undocumented Palestinians. The authorities apply the law selectively. There is systematic discrimination against Israeli-Palestinians (20 per cent of Israel's population) right from school, says Human Rights Watch. A 2003 law illegalizes marriage between Israelis and Palestinians (by ethnicity, nationality, or residence). Even the private sector discriminates by adding a "fine-print" line to job advertisements: "After Military Service" - which is open only to Jewish Israelis. These harsh conditions leave Palestinians few options: they cannot

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assemble or protest peacefully. Forums for Israeli-Palestine dialogue/interaction are shrinking. There are no civil society or official negotiations ... The PA's post-2002 isolation and humiliation by Israel has intensified Palestinian frustration. Under Oslo, the PA assumed responsibilities for health, education, law-and-order, etc. But it could not deliver- because of lack of resources, Israeli obstruction, inefficiency or corruption. Non-performance has further eroded its popularity. The greatest loser from this is the Arafat-controlled Fatah group. The vacuum has been filled partially by extremists like Hamas and Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, and partly by new groups like Palestinian National Initiative led by Mustafa Barghouthi, and grassroots NGOs working with refugees, which attract the youth with imaginative ideas. Despite repression aimed at ending all negotiations, there is intellectual ferment and policy-oriented debate in Palestinian society - on non-violent vs violent methods, on two-state and single-state (bilateral or secular) solutions, and on strategies to attract multilateral global intervention (since Washington is transparently a "dishonest broker"). There is popular pressure on Hamas to abandon terrorist attacks on non-combatants, which turn counter-productive, and also accept the reality of Israel. The greatest hope in the street is that of a unified Palestinian leadership, independent of Washington, which can mobilize the combined resources of people under occupation, the Israeli-Palestinians, the Diaspora, and the international community."

WTO

12. "INDIAN-MADE SUCCESS," editorial in the May 7 centrist THE HINDU. "While global pharmaceutical companies claim generic medicines are of unproven quality when they lobby against the use of these drugs in national public health programs, research studies are increasingly undermining this argument. The latest example of scientific research validating the approach followed by the manufacturers of generics - mainly in India and Brazil - is a three-year-study conducted in the United States ... The study, reported in the well-known New England Journal of Medicine, concludes that triple combination therapy (another term for the medication) is best suited to patients who are put on a drug regimen for the first time. The results of this research come at a time when the U.S. Government has been calling for fresh clinical trials to establish the safety of combination

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therapy, which has had the effect of slowing down the implementation of the World Health Organization's ambitious global program of treating three million HIV patients by 2005. The new research should, however, encourage the Government of India to push ahead and gradually expand the recently launched program to provide free medication to HIV patients in selected States ... The advantages of this fixed dose combination are, first, only two, not six, pills need to be consumed every day, and, secondly, there is a tremendous saving in cost ... The argument is that adequate clinical trials have not been conducted to establish their safety. If the drugs fail the tests, so the argument goes, there is a strong likelihood of drug-resistant strains emerging with the use of the medicines developed by Indian companies. The heated argument relates to the use in international treatment programs of patented drugs manufactured by the global pharma multinationals and Indian-made generics. Under the WTO laws, since the present generation of anti-retrovirals can be produced as generics, there is no legal argument that can be made against their use in the developing countries. Instead, the majors first tried to block the implementation of a WTO declaration intended to make it easier to access the generic variants ... In both instances, the U.S. Government has spoken the language of the multinationals. The unfortunate aspect of the criticism of fixed-dose combination drugs is that the markets in the advanced economies are not in danger of being swamped by the generics. It is the WHO's global AIDS treatment program - targeted at the 30 million patients in Africa and the Caribbean - that is in danger of failing. WHO is short of resources and the U.S., which has committed itself to providing Dols. 15 billion for treatment programs, will not release funds until the quality issue is settled. In short, the opposition to the use of cheaper drugs that are more easily taken is preventing the coverage of a larger population carrying HIV."

----- US ELECTIONS -----

13. "PERSONAL IS POLITICAL" editorial-page article in May 7 centrist THE TELEGRAPH by noted columnist Swapan Dasgupta:
"The contrast with Western democracies could not have been

sharper. In the ongoing campaign for the White House, the Democratic candidate, John Kerry, is having a harrowing time providing details of something he said on TV more than 30 years ago. He has to explain his wife's tax returns and how

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much he paid for a haircut. The public interrogation of Kerry is, of course, mere tittle-tattle compared to the scrutiny of his financial affairs and sexual escapades that President Bill Clinton was subjected to ... The intrusiveness of Anglo-Saxon democratic tradition rests on the principle that a person seeking public office has forfeited the right of privacy and that all his actions, both past and present, must be a matter of public record. The lengthy campaign period for the Presidential election is aimed at testing a candidate to the hilt, to assess whether or not he is above board and capable of coping with the unavoidable pressures of high elected office. Given the levels of endurance required, it is an automatic deterrent against those who seek to create ephemeral electoral waves based on their ability to hold successful road shows. Evolved democracies, it would seem, have a more rigorous approach to finding the best candidate for public office. The squeamishness in India over raking up the personal life of an aspirant may appear as gentlemanly conduct. In reality, it leaves too many unanswered questions which, had they been clarified, would have contributed to a more informed choice. Like, how was Rahul awarded an MPhil without a basic graduate degree?"

EU

14. "BEYOND BORDERS" editorial in May 7 centrist THE

TELEGRAPH: "The latest expansion of the European Union will undoubtedly give it formidable trading and political influence. It remains to be seen, however, if the new EU will be able to actively promote peace and prosperity on the continent and beyond ... Moreover, this is by no means the final expansion of the EU. A waiting list of potential members will be taken up in several phases over the next few years. While the emergence of the expanded EU has been cause for celebration in several of the member countries, there is no doubt that the Union is and will continue to be confronted by huge hurdles in the months to come. The most striking problem is the economic disparity on the continent ... In other words, there will continue to be two economic entities within the EU for years, if not decades, to come. This will, not unexpectedly, generate political and social tension. Similarly, there are widespread differences over foreign policy, especially with regard to Europe's relationship with the United States of America. The old members, barring the United Kingdom, are generally skeptical of US policies and have, in recent months, not shied away

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from expressing as much. In contrast, the new members view the Atlantic relationship as important, and view the presence of the US in Europe as a way of offsetting the dominance of larger European countries like Germany. The chances, therefore, of developing a common foreign and security policy seem remote, at least in the foreseeable future ... Nevertheless, despite the problems, the enlargement of Europe once again reinforces the importance of the free-market, democracy and, above all, the spirit of

reconciliation."

----- INDIAN ELECTIONS -----

15. "WILL THERE BE NO 'MUSLIM VOTE' (Kicker) QUESTION IS BEING RAISED WITHIN THE SOCIETY," editorial-page article in May 7 independent Calcutta Bengali ANANDABAZAR PATRIKA by New Delhi Bureau Chief Jayanta Ghosal:

a. "This time Muslims have become much more conscious and the result of this awareness will be the polarization of Muslim votes. The Muslim psyche is no longer anyone's prime possession. However, the most unique rider to this year's election happens to be the BJP's begging for Muslim votes. A fan club, which was recently set up in the Prime Minister's own constituency comprising Urdu poets and intellectuals, is lobbying for Vajpayee. The party's minority cell has held a meeting of Moulavis (Islamic clergy) and jointly prayed for Vajpayee's victory. Urdu newspapers are publishing photographs of Vajpayee embracing his Pakistani counterpart Jamali. Comprehensively, it is impossible that the BJP would be able to garner the majority of Muslim votes. Sensing trouble, the BJP leadership has fielded Narendra Modi in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Seeing that the Sangha Parivar (Sangh family - extremist Hindu organization) to become active again on the issue of Hindutva (hardcore Hinduism), Muslims may naturally ask which is the BJP's face and which is its mask? The BJP explains the point in a different manner. First, they think that a section of Hindu voters too are secular. They are not anti-Muslims and are rather against a communal, hard line BJP. The BJP has to do this for the sake of liberal Hindus. Second, the BJP is showing this kind of love in order to divide the vote bank even while conceding that it will not get Muslim votes ... But the change has emerged this time from within the Muslim society ... The Muslim society itself is now advocating against mixing up Islam with votes...

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b. The Muslim society too has now realized that in the geographical or population context the word 'minority' is no longer so relevant. Post 9/11, while the so-called Islamic terrorism has been spreading panic globally the western world has put the Muslim society in a tight spot. On the other hand, the Muslim psyche wants to establish itself in this year's election as an entirely free entity by coming out of this sphere of suspicion. Even fundamentalists cannot rule that psyche and it is beyond the capacity of the country's political lobby to persuade the electorate."

Mulford

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